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# Take Good Care Of The Garden And The Dogs: A True Story Of Bad Breaks And Small Miracles



## Synopsis

The Alaskan landscape "so vast, dramatic, and unbelievable" may be the reason the people in Haines, Alaska (population 2,400), so often discuss the meaning of life. Heather Lende thinks it helps make life mean more. Since her bestselling first book, *If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name*, a near-fatal bicycle accident has given Lende a few more reasons to consider matters both spiritual and temporal. Her idea of spirituality is rooted in community, and here she explores faith and forgiveness, loss and devotion "as well as raising totem poles, canning salmon, and other distinctly Alaskan adventures. Lende's irrepressible spirit, her wry humor, and her commitment to living a life on the edge of the world resonate on every page. Like her own mother's last wish "take good care of the garden and dogs" Lende's writing, so honest and unadorned, deepens our understanding of what links all humanity.

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Algonquin Books (April 19, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1616200510

ASIN: B005Q5PJLY

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 189 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,044,500 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #59 in Books > Travel > United States > Alaska > General #3104 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists #4427 in Books > Travel > United States > West > Pacific

## Customer Reviews

Shortly after the publication of her first series of dispatches from "Small-Town Alaska," *If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name*, obituary writer and Anchorage Daily News columnist Lende got run over by a truck: "The back tire of the new king-cab, three-quarter ton Chevy pickup rolled right over my lap." In this collection of mordant but largely uplifting pieces, Lende recalls that near-fatal bicycle accident, and her slow return to health with the help of doctors, therapists, family, and friends. While considering the big questions of life and death, Lende introduces an eclectic cast of characters from a town of just 2,400, including Wilma Henderson, a "formidable farmwife and Presbyterian elder" who believes in "praying with your feet

**\*Starred Review\*** While biking downtown, daydreaming about her upcoming tour for *If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name* (2005), Lende was hit by a truck. Literally. It ran over her torso. So no tour, but the makings of another book, which moves as far beyond the clichés of the hurt-but-heroic personal-triumph genre as Lende's town, Haines, Alaska, is from . . . well, even Juneau and Anchorage, to say nothing of the world outside. What distinguishes it is Lende's relationship with her community and her faith, both of which present challenges as well as comforts. Small town Alaskan life ain't easy. Far too many are lost to alcoholism, weather, violence, and accidents at sea and in the wild. Lende should know: she writes the local paper's obits. Friendships, family, and natural beauty sustain her and other survivors. As for her faith, it isn't always easy, either. So few meet in her Episcopal congregation's borrowed quarters that they have an unpaid vicar rather than a priest. God doesn't always seem to answer; why, for instance, does Lende's beloved mother go down to death still fighting, while an Alaskan friend passes away in beatific calm? Sometimes her moral compass seems to roll around rather than point north. Lende writes emotionally but never sentimentally, giving us the best Alaska memoir of late, maybe the best ever. --Patricia Monaghan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read this book because my sister-in-law lives in Haines, Alaska, the small town that Heather Lende writes about in this and her first book. I've visited this town and life is certainly different. The winters are harsh and many of the things the rest of us take for granted are not so readily available. Like our choice of supermarkets or having a hospital close by. When the writer was literally run over by a truck, she had to be airlifted to a trauma hospital in Seattle. And here is the next coincidence I found in her book. My mother was operated on by the same excellent orthopedic surgeon in the same hospital. The writer recovers with the support of friends and neighbors. So life in a small town in Alaska has its inconveniences but the upside is that the community is a real community. They're there for each other and neighborly because they're all in the same small boat. She relates stories and anecdotes about incidents and accidents and histories of many of the colorful residents. It draws you in and everything is washed in a poetic cozy homespun glow. Life in this town harkens back to a more simple time, when people built their own houses and grew their own food and pulled together to help each other out. Many people hunt and fish and their houses are decorated with hides and stuffed heads and antlers. She describes hunting goats and bears. As a vegetarian, this is a part of the book I didn't like. She also talked quite a bit about her

involvement in church and her faith which I also didn't relate to but that is who she is and I still found the book interesting and enjoyable and philosophical.~

I am not sure how I ended up getting hold of Heather Lende's first book, "If You Lived Here, I'd Know Your Name" but it was a copy that I didn't own. After reading that fabulous book, I purchased it to add to my library (which is contrary to my overall philosophy of getting rid of "stuff"). I loved it so much that I knew I would re-read it and want to loan it out to friends - which I have. While I was falling in love with Haines, Alaska and Ms. Lende's stories, I had no idea that she was battling a major accident. A truck literally ran over her while she was out biking just prior to the release of the previous book. Due to that life-altering event, the tone of this second book is a bit different from the first. The reader is given a glimpse of the horrific accident and the major trauma she endured as well as what it is like to go through something like this where there is no trauma center nearby. The first portion of the book revolves around what was happening in her life at the time of the accident and the year following as she recovers and also deals with the death of her mother. Later in the book, the message changes a bit and, while still important as any life-changing event would be, there is a return to more of the tone of the previous book. Alaska again takes center stage and the reader is allowed a glimpse into the lives of the people who live there. Part spiritual exploration, part physical/emotional healing, part love letter to Alaska, this is a wonderful book that continues to chronicle life in that beautiful state. A strong recommendation to anyone interested in Alaska or interested in the strength and resiliency of an incredible woman/family. (Note: I bought it in hardback and it is staying with the other "stuff" I can't possibly get rid of !)

I find Heather Lende's writing to be unique... I am not a fan of the reviews that compare her writing to other authors ...partly as not many of them are authors I like (I am not a Lamott or Dillard fan at all!). I read Heather Lende's first book and this second book, back to back having just discovered her writing. I loved both but I thought this book had a bit more depth, more experience, more emotion...but as the one review I DO really agree with states: she writes "emotionally but not sentimentally" - that is an important distinction to me. Emotion is real...sentimentality is often overboard and uncomfortable. I enjoyed the mingling of stories around a theme, the conclusions drawn, the experience shared. For the record, I am a 3x married, but now single woman in my late 50's - no children. I am conservative politically. I have a strong and living faith but do not attend any church. Despite all these things, I very much enjoy and have learned from the writings of a woman of my years but a woman who is a mother and grandmother, a liberal!!! and a church

goer. Perspective is a funny thing. My perspective of this book is of a wonderful sharing of one person's experience in a small town in Alaska. I enjoyed it very much and think I will be rereading it many times.

A thoughtful book juxtaposing the author's experiences with a life threatening accident and her mother's death, probably best preceded by the reading of Mrs. Lende's earlier "If You Lived Here I'd Know Your Name." If you enjoy small towns and the interesting people who live in and around them, you'll enjoy both books. Care for others, even those with whom we disagree, and true community are common themes expressed in practical ways without sanctimoniousness. The author is an NPR commentator; these books read like that.

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